

# **Politics and the Operational Level of War**

**A Monograph  
by  
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## **Abstract**

POLITICS AND THE OPERATIONAL LEVEL OF WAR by MAJ Matthew A. McGrew, U.S. Army, 45 pages.

First introduced into U.S. Army doctrine in 1982, the operational level of war developed to remove politics from an inherently political process. American writers absorbed Soviet writing on the subject and translated it into existing doctrine without a complete understanding of the intellectual history underpinning the Soviet concept of operational art. The U.S. Army adopted the operational level in response to professional drift after Vietnam, concern over the Soviet Union, and a desire to limit political interference at the tactical level. Specifically, U.S. innovations sought to remove politics from the application of military means as a way of professionalizing the Army officer corps by following Huntington's approach to civil-military relations.

Since its inception, the operational level has failed to perform this basic function – to filter political interference at the tactical level. Therefore, it has created an unreasonable expectation among Army officers that political leadership will refrain from injecting themselves into tactical actions. Additionally, U.S. writers viewed operational art and the operational level of war as interchangeable. This clouded the importance of operational art to the conduct of war regardless of echelon. Therefore, operational art retains its relevancy with or without the operational level of war.

U.S. Army doctrine writers have a unique opportunity to correct a mistake from twenty years ago as they rewrite the Army's capstone document, *FM 3-0*. Serious consideration needs to be given the utility and relevance of the operational level to how the U.S. Army conducts war. Removing the operational level from doctrine will reestablish the link between tactics and strategy and generate increased understanding of the impact of tactics on strategy across the force.

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## Introduction

The conceptualization of an operational level of war is unhelpful to the planning and conduct of war. It was first introduced in the 1982 version of the United States Army's capstone manual *FM 100-5*:

The operational level of war uses available military resources to attain strategic goals within a theater of war. Most simply, it is the theory of larger unit operations. It also involves planning and conducting campaigns. Campaigns are sustained operations designed to defeat an enemy force in a specified space and time with simultaneous and sequential battles. The disposition of forces, selection of objectives, and actions taken to weaken or to out-manuever the enemy all set the terms of the next battle and exploit tactical gains. They are all part of the operational level of war. In AirLand Battle doctrine, this level includes the marshaling of forces and logistical support, providing direction to ground and air maneuver, applying conventional and nuclear fires in depth, and employing unconventional and psychological warfare.<sup>1</sup>

As an idea, the U.S. Army's concept for the operational level of war developed during a period when many officers were frustrated with the direct influence of key political leaders on the tactical battlefield. Many officers blamed civilian interference for defeat in Vietnam.<sup>2</sup> The operational level of war developed as a way to limit politics in what U.S. Army officers saw as their professional domain: the tactical employment of force. In effect, it was an attempt to remove politics from an inherently political process. However, politics provides the original motive for war and defines what is acceptable in the conduct of warfare.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, it is impossible to prevent political involvement in the tactical employment of forces.

This attempt to separate tactics and strategy is what most authors who oppose the operational level of war contest today.<sup>4</sup> Strategy and tactics are interrelated elements of the

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<sup>1</sup> Department of the Army, *FM 100-5, Operations* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1982), 2-3.

<sup>2</sup> James Kitfield, *Prodigal Soldiers* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 126.

<sup>3</sup> "The political object – the original motive for the war – will thus determine both the military objective to be reached and the amount of effort it requires." Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 81.

<sup>4</sup> Colin Gray, *The Strategy Bridge* (London: Oxford University Press, 2010); Hew Strachan. "Strategy or Alibi? Obama, McChrystal and the Operational Level of War," *Survival*, 52: 5; Justin Kelly

conduct of war. Any effort to separate the two is certain to cause problems by widening the gap between politics and warfare.<sup>5</sup> It can cause practitioners on either side to neglect the other. Strategists neglect tactics because they see it as a subset of the operational level of war. Conversely, tacticians ignore strategy because they expect it to be explained for them through the operational level.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the operational level of war increases the probability of operational purposes directing tactical behavior in place of strategic ends.<sup>7</sup> In these critiques of U.S. Army doctrine, the linking of operational level and operational art occurs because U.S. Army doctrine writers linked them. American writers absorbed Soviet ideas on the subject and translated them into existing doctrine without a complete understanding of the intellectual history underpinning the Soviet concept of operational art.

Understanding how these two concepts became linked requires a basic understanding of the differences between Soviet and U.S. post-conflict innovation. Both the U.S. and Soviet armies experienced distinct periods of post-conflict innovation. The Soviet period of innovation started with the end of the Soviet-Polish War in late 1920 and ended with the publication of the Soviet Army Field Manual in 1936. The U.S. Army's period of innovation started in 1973 and ended with the publication of the 1986 edition of FM 100-5. Both armies viewed recent wars as defeats, and both were trying to reform and reorganize in response to changes in their environment.

However, the context of each period was distinct because of differing political and social climates, each army's recent experiences in war, and the different roles each army fulfilled within their government. Their governments are radically different in political orientation. The Soviet Union was a communist totalitarian state that stressed conformity and limited individual political

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and Mike Brennan. *Alien: How Operational Art Devoured Strategy* (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> "The result has been a well-demonstrated ability to win battles that have not always contributed to strategic success, i.e., "a way of battle rather than a way of war." Kelly, *Alien*, 93.

<sup>6</sup> Gray, *The Strategy Bridge*, 271.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 271.

expression. By 1925, Josef Stalin had established a totalitarian government, characterized by absolute control over the population and the military. Stalin was a member of the military as well as the leader of the Soviet Union. Soviet politics were firmly embedded throughout the Soviet Army; for example, political advisors down to the battalion and sometimes company level ensured military personnel conformed to the Communist party. The integration of military and party leadership permitted a high degree of flexibility in shifting from political to military emphasis in their external relations.<sup>8</sup> Shifting between political and military emphasis in their external relations is much more complicated for the United States.

American democratic government makes civil-military relations and the development of strategy more difficult because of the constitutionally constructed division of powers.<sup>9</sup> The nature of democracies demands flexibility at the strategic level.<sup>10</sup> U.S. national strategy has always been the product of competition between a host of different participants.<sup>11</sup> Military officers' desire clarity and commitment from political leaders that is often unrealistic in a democracy. Therefore, conducting war to meet political objectives is challenging in the American system.

The nature of their respective economies was different for the Soviet Union and the United States. Stalin exercised centralized control of the Soviet economy. The "war scare" of 1927 provided a sense of urgency, and in 1928, Stalin began his first Five Year Plan to industrialize the economy.<sup>12</sup> The purpose of this plan was to make the Soviet Union economically and militarily self-sufficient and prepared for another crisis. The massive industrialization project

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<sup>8</sup> Edward Atkeson, "Soviet Military Theory: Relevant or Red Herring?" *Parameters* (Spring 1987), 84.

<sup>9</sup> The Executive Branch, Congress, the individual states and the different military institutions all compete to some degree over the execution and direction of any war.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Pearlman, *Warmaking and American Democracy: The Struggle over Military Strategy, 1700 to the Present* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1999), 10; Peter Feaver, *Armed Servants: Agency, Oversight, and Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 9.

<sup>11</sup> Pearlman, *Warmaking and American Democracy*, 2.

<sup>12</sup> The United Kingdom broke off diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union in May of 1927 as a result of Russian support for Communist forces in China.



provided the Soviet military with the means to mechanize. In contrast, the U.S. economy in 1970 did not perform the same functions and was not centrally controlled by the U.S. government. The U.S. economy was marked by stagflation at the end of 1970s characterized by rampant inflation and rising unemployment.<sup>13</sup> The 1973-1974 oil embargoes by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) resulted in a rise in energy costs and added to increased inflation. The Federal debt more than doubled in the ten years between 1970 and 1980 because of increased government spending and low taxes.<sup>14</sup>

The social context of the United States during the 1970s is important to understanding the U.S. Army's attempts to reform and reorganize the force. The U.S. Army suffered a crisis of identity coming out of Vietnam.<sup>15</sup> Conscription ended in 1973, and the Army struggled to transition to an all-volunteer force.<sup>16</sup> As the Army struggled with its identity and relevance, it hung on to the image of itself dating to the end of WWII. This image and the realities of Vietnam created tension in the U.S. Army's relationship with the civilian politicians responsible for the creation of strategy. This tension resulted from how the U.S. Army assigned responsibility for their defeat.

How both armies viewed their defeat is a critical distinction. The Soviet Army viewed their defeat as an army failure. The U.S. Army viewed their loss as resulting from excessive

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<sup>13</sup> Outline of the U.S. Economy, Chapter 3. The term "stagflation" – an economic condition of both continuing inflation and stagnant business activity, together with an increasing unemployment rate – described the new economic malaise.

<sup>14</sup> Office of Management and Budget, *Table 7.1 – Federal Debt at the End of the Year: 1940-2016*, accessed at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/Historicals>, on 21 April 2011. The deficit rose from \$380,921,000 in 1970 to \$909,041,000 in 1980.

<sup>15</sup> Carl Builder, *The Masks of War: American military styles in Strategy and Analysis* (Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press, 1989), 38.

<sup>16</sup> Peter Karsten, *The Military in America from the Colonial Era to the Present*. (New York: The Free Press, 1986), 465, 472; James Kitfield, *Prodigal Soldiers* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995) 126; Colin Powell, *My American Journey* (New York: Random House, 1995) 181-187. Desertion was also a significant issue between 1970 and 1980, with the highest levels occurring in 1973/1974. Increased use of heroin and opium among enlisted soldiers was also evident among those returning from Vietnam in 1971.

civilian involvement in Vietnam. Civilian intrusion into the conduct of Vietnam was a bitter source of contention with senior Army officers and many vowed that it would never happen again.<sup>17</sup> This perception resulted in a post-conflict innovation that was unique to the U.S. Army – an attempt to remove politics from the application of military means as a way of professionalizing the Army officer corps. This innovation followed Huntington’s approach to civil-military relations, and led to the development of an operational level of war, which served as a distinct boundary between political decisions and military execution.<sup>18</sup>

The desire to delink civil-military relations, while understandable, is unrealistic because this idea ignores the inherently political nature of war and the fact that success or failure on the battlefield could alter political goals.<sup>19</sup> Delinking civil-military relations was an attempt to clearly establish roles, responsibilities, and acceptable channels for communication between political and military leaders. This attempt to professionalize the Army officer corps was not present in the Soviet period of innovation. In fact, it was inconceivable to them because of their style of government.<sup>20</sup>

The remainder of this monograph is divided into three sections. The first section compares and contrasts Soviet and U.S periods of post-conflict innovation in order to understand how U.S. Army doctrine writers interpreted Soviet ideas. Additionally, it discusses the methodology for the comparative case studies, which investigate the relevancy of the operational

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<sup>17</sup> Kitfield, *Prodigal Soldiers*, 12; Pearlman, *Warmaking and American Democracy*, 16.

<sup>18</sup> “Civilian control in the objective sense is the maximizing of military professionalism. More precisely, it is that distribution of political power between military and civilian groups which is most conducive to the emergence of professional attitudes and behavior among the members of the officer corps... Objective civilian control achieves its end by militarizing the military, making them the tool of the state.” Samuel Huntington, *The Soldier and the State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 83.

<sup>19</sup> “The political object is the goal, war is the means of reaching it, and means can never be considered in isolation from their purpose.” Clausewitz, *On War*, 87; Pearlman, *Warmaking and American Democracy*, 29.

<sup>20</sup> Aleksandr Svechin, *Strategy* (Minneapolis, MN: East View Press, 1991), 175-177.

level of war as expressed in the 1986 edition of FM 100-5. The second section examines three case studies: Operation Desert Storm, Operation Joint Endeavor, and Operation Palliser. This section will focus on analyzing the U.S. Army's conception of the operational level of war with events as they occurred. The final section of this monograph makes the assertion that the operational level is unhelpful and recommends areas for further study.

## POST-CONFLICT INNOVATION

### Soviet Reform

The Soviet concept of operational art originates from three primary wartime experiences: World War One (WWI), the Russian revolution, and the 1920 Soviet-Polish War.<sup>21</sup> The concept of operational art developed while the Soviet Union was still young and trying to consolidate a new political system.<sup>22</sup> Soviet theorists defined operational art as “the totality of maneuver and battles in a given part of a theater of military action directed toward the achievement of the common goal set as final in the given period of the campaign.”<sup>23</sup> The survival of the nation depended upon the ideas of population mass mobilization and economic industrialization in defense of the state. Mechanization coupled with mass mobilization became the two central components in the Soviet development of military theory.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Azar Gat, *A History of Military Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 634.

<sup>22</sup> Further complicating the Soviet situation was the fact that they were surrounded by hostile nations that had recently completed an intervention inside of its borders. The international community had previously supported the old Tsarist regime.

<sup>23</sup> Jacob Kipp, “General-Marshal A.A. Svechin and Modern Warfare.” in A.A. Svechin, *Strategy* (Minneapolis, MN: East View Press, 1991) 38. Varfolomeev attributed this definition to one of Svechin's lectures at the Frunze Military Academy.

<sup>24</sup> Jacob Kipp, “The Origins of Soviet Operational Art, 1917-1936” in *Historical Perspectives of the Operational Art* edited by Michael Krause and R. Phillips (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, United States Army, 2005), 220.; Frederick Kagan, “Army Doctrine and Modern War: Notes Toward a New Edition of FM 100-5,” *Parameters* (1997) accessed online at <http://www.carlisle.army.mil/usawc/Parameters/Articles/97spring/kagan.htm> on 15 March 2011; Azar Gat, *A History of Military Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 634.

WWI was a searing experience for the Russians.<sup>25</sup> The industrialization of warfare over the preceding fifty years, combined with the rise in massive armies, had profound effects in the course of the war. Modern weaponry was more lethal at greater distances and served to extend the width and depth of the battlefield. It was unavoidable that what started as a war of maneuver on the Western front evolved into a war of attrition characterized by trench warfare. The resultant stalemate meant casualties and brutality on a scale never before seen. In their postwar assessment, the Soviets determined that in order to avoid positional battles, mobility and mass were critical to enabling maneuver in the future.

The Russian Revolution influenced Soviet thinking about operational art, too. Unlike western experiences in WWI, the Russian battlefield became disaggregated in space and time because of limited supporting infrastructure and the geographic expanse. The Bolshevik success depended on control of the railroads around Moscow. The Soviets had to reorganize the economy in order to support the fielding of a mass army equipped with the basics – the rifle, machine gun, and field artillery.<sup>26</sup> Cavalry was also revived as an effective combat arm because of the distances involved and the limited forces. Adequate logistical support necessary for long distance operations required the support of the economic base to the war effort. The Soviets took three major lessons away from their experiences. First, technology had expanded the battlefield to such an extent that single, decisive battles were no longer possible. Second, maneuver was required in order to defeat a dispersed enemy and mechanization provided the potential for maneuver at a pace not yet seen. Finally, linking the economic base to the front was critical to the exploitation

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<sup>25</sup> G.S. Isserson, “The Evolution of Operational Art,” in Harold Orenstein, *The Evolution of Soviet Operational Art, 1927-1991: the Documentary Basis, Volume I* (London: Frank Cass, 1995) 53-77; Williamson Murray, “The West at War 1914-1918” in *The Cambridge History of Warfare* edited by Geoffrey Parker (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 311-313.

<sup>26</sup> Kipp, “The Origins of Soviet Operational Art,” 223.

of mass.<sup>27</sup> These lessons would require significant reform and reorganization of the Soviet Army to adapt to the requirements of modern war.

The events of the 1920 Soviet-Polish War shook the Soviet Army's confidence again, convincing its leadership of the necessity to reform and reorganize. The Soviet Army's size alone should have provided them with the ability to defeat the much smaller Polish Army. The Soviet-Polish War began when the Polish Army occupied Kiev on 25 April 1920.<sup>28</sup> Soviet forces under the command of Mikail Tukhachevsky responded with a series of attacks that forced Polish forces out of Kiev by June 1920. By the first week of August, Polish forces were driven back to within 30 miles of Warsaw.<sup>29</sup> On 13 August, Tukhachevsky initiated his attack on Warsaw, expecting the Poles to continue to fight a linear defense. Instead, the Poles changed their formation to a defense in depth with a strong counterattack force. As a result, the Soviets had an entire army destroyed. An exposed flank enabled this destruction.<sup>30</sup> Both governments eventually sued for peace, and each declared victory. More importantly, the Soviet Army considered the war a defeat because they had not achieved their objectives: to destroy the Polish Army in the field, and to occupy Warsaw. The Soviets drew three major lessons from this war. The first was a need for phasing in operations because of their inability to destroy the enemy in one decisive blow; second, the importance of logistics in their offense to allow for continuous operations; and third, they recognized their difficulties in controlling subordinate elements due to the distances involved in modern warfare.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Sally Stroecker, *Forging Stalin's Army: Marshal Tukhachevsky and the Politics of Military Innovation* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 11-12; Kagan, "Army Doctrine and Modern War."

<sup>28</sup> Harold Worrell, *The Battle of Warsaw, 1920: Impact on Operational Thought* (monograph, School for Advanced Military Studies, 1994) 14-15. Some scholars contend that the border clashes beginning in 1919 signal the actual start of the war.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>30</sup> Malcolm Mackintosh, *Juggernaut: A History of the Soviet Armed Forces* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1967), 50.

<sup>31</sup> Worrell, *The Battle of Warsaw*, 37-40.

During the interwar period, Soviet military writing was healthy and contentious, ripe with different writers who disputed each other. Soviet Army officers vigorously debated how to reform and reorganize in order to meet future threats. They argued over their experiences of the last ten years and wrestled with the potential impact of new technologies in motorization, communication and logistics. Four writers in particular had significant influence on the direction of Soviet thought and later American thought. They were Alexander Svechin, V.K. Triandafillov, G.S. Isserson, and M. Tukhachevsky. Those four authors are categorized into two camps, one focused on attrition of the enemy and the other on annihilation through decisive battle. Svechin, Triandafillov and Isserson may be placed in the former and Tukhachevsky in the latter. The writings of all four significantly influenced how the Soviet Army reformed and reorganized. These four writers identified the requirement for mechanized, mass-mobilized forces utilizing operational art to conduct successive operations throughout the depth of the battlefield in order to defeat modern armies.

Aleksandr Svechin was a former Tsarist general staff officer who joined the Red Army in March 1918. He served in the Russo-Japanese War, WWI and the Russian Civil War. Later, he was assigned to the Frunze Academy's Department of Strategy as an instructor where, in 1923, he wrote his seminal work, *Strategy*, and updated it in 1927.<sup>32</sup> He is credited with defining operational art as: "the totality of maneuver and battles in a given part of a theater of military action directed toward the achievement of the common goal set as final in the given period of the campaign."<sup>33</sup> Svechin went on to say:

Tactics and administration are the material of operational art and the success of the development of an operation depends on both the successful solution of individual

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<sup>32</sup> Harold Orenstein, *The Evolution of Soviet Operational Art, 1927-1991: The Documentary Basis, Vol. I* (London: Frank Cass & Co, LTD. 1995), 3.

<sup>33</sup> Kipp, "General-Marshal A.A. Svechin and Modern Warfare," 38.

tactical problems by the forces and the provision of all material they need to conduct an operation without interruption until the ultimate goal is achieved.<sup>34</sup>

His work became the foundation upon which other Soviet writers continued to develop their ideas.

Tukhachevsky was the Soviets' youngest commander during the Soviet-Polish War. His experiences in that conflict had a profound impact on his views regarding Soviet innovation and reform.<sup>35</sup> As the chief of the Soviet Army staff from 1925 to 1928, Tukhachevsky was able to influence Frunze Military Academy students in their study.<sup>36</sup> As the Soviet Chief of Staff, Tukhachevsky was also responsible for overseeing the modernization and reorganization of the Soviet Army. His work focused on the mechanization of the mass army in order to conduct decisive operations.<sup>37</sup> Tukhachevsky believed in the importance of the pursuit because it allowed the attacker to maintain control of the situation by denying the enemy time to regroup.<sup>38</sup> His views influence both V.K. Triandafillov and G.S. Isserson, who worked for him. Finally, Tukhachevsky became a vocal opponent of Svechin in the 1930s, seeking to diminish his contributions to Soviet military theory.<sup>39</sup>

V.K. Triandafillov also served in the Tsarist Army before joining the Red Army in 1918. He commanded a battalion, regiment and brigade, fighting on the Ural Front and then on the South and Southwest Fronts.<sup>40</sup> He served as an instructor at the Frunze Military Academy in the

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<sup>34</sup> Aleksandr Svechin, *Strategy* (Minneapolis, MN: East View Press, 1991), 69.

<sup>35</sup> Worrell, *The Battle of Warsaw*, 37-40.

<sup>36</sup> Richard Harrison, *Architect of Soviet Victory in World War II: The Life and Theories of G.S. Isserson* (London: McFarland & Company, 2010), 43.

<sup>37</sup> Kipp, "The Origins of Soviet Operational Art," 237.

<sup>38</sup> Richard Simpkin, *Deep Battle: the Brainchild of Marshal Tukhachevskii* (London: Brassey's Defence Publishers, 1987), 91-92.

<sup>39</sup> A.A. Kokoshin and V.V. Larionov, "Origins of the Intellectual Rehabilitation of A.A. Svechin" in A.A. Svechin, *Strategy* edited by Kent Lee (Minneapolis, MN: East View Publications, 1991), 3.

<sup>40</sup> Kipp, "The Origins of Soviet Operational Art," 233.

early 1920s before he became the deputy chief of staff of the Soviet Army.<sup>41</sup> Triandafillov's writings were extremely influential even after he was killed in an airplane crash in 1931.<sup>42</sup> His theory of successive operations was incorporated into the 1929 and 1936 provisional military manuals. Chapter VII of the 1936 edition repeatedly stresses the importance of successive operations in the attack. Triandafillov published *The Scope of Operations of Modern Armies* in 1926, which is significant because it was where Triandafillov first developed the idea of successive operations.<sup>43</sup> In 1929, he incorporated much of this work into *The Nature of Operations of Modern Armies*. Together, these two books provide the foundation for the emerging Soviet theory of deep operations with emphasis on successive operations to achieve decisive results. Additionally, these books identified the requirement for mechanized, mass-mobilized forces to defeat the most likely threat to the Soviet Union.<sup>44</sup> Triandafillov believed a mechanized coalition of British, French and Polish forces was the most dangerous threat to the Soviet Union.

G.S. Isserson served as a soldier and officer in both the Tsarist military and Soviet Army and was one of the few military theorists to survive the purges of 1937 -1938. Isserson perceived himself as the successor to Triandafillov's intellectual thoughts. He was assigned to the Frunze Military Academy as an instructor in 1929, remaining there until 1933. During this period, he expanded upon Triandafillov's theories of successive operations. Isserson introduced the notion that is the cornerstone of Soviet operational art: the echelonment of the attack to match the

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 234-235.

<sup>42</sup> *Provisional Field Regulations for the Red Army*, translated and released by the Foreign Broadcast Information Service (Springfield, VA: National Technical Information Service, U.S. Department of Commerce, 1986), 52-72.

<sup>43</sup> James J. Schneider, "Introduction," in V.K. Triandafillov, *The Nature of the Operations of Modern Armies*, edited by Jacop W. Kipp (Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 1994), xxxi.

<sup>44</sup> V.K. Triandafillov, *The Nature of the Operations of Modern Armies*, edited by Jacop W. Kipp (Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 1994) 65-68. This section discusses the future of armies and the need for mobilization and mechanization in order to win.; Ibid., 127, begins his discussion of successive operations.



echelonment of the defense, and the principle of strategic dispersion of forces prior to their massing for the final decisive blow.<sup>45</sup> Depth became a critical factor because single, decisive battles were no longer possible because of the increased lethality, mobility and size of modern armies. He postulated that the decisive blow only occurs after a series of blows along the entire depth of offensive movement.<sup>46</sup>

Finally, Isserson was involved in the writing of what was to become the 1936 Red Army Field Manual under the direction of Tukhachevsky.<sup>47</sup> This is the last major doctrinal work by officers of the Red Army before the purge of 1937 and represented the summation of Soviet thinking on deep operations and operational art. Tukhachevsky's influence is apparent in its focus on the annihilation of the enemy.<sup>48</sup> Tukhachevsky's thoughts on mechanization and decisive battle harmonize with Triandafillov's theory of successive operations and Isserson's expansion into deep operations. Svechin's theory of operational art is conspicuously absent from the manual, which is easily understood in light of Tukhachevsky's hatred for him.<sup>49</sup> Glimpses of Svechin are still apparent in the manual's discussion about the importance of logistics in order to conduct uninterrupted operations and the need to integrate tactical action to achieve success.<sup>50</sup> Soviet Army officers reading this manual are intimately aware of Svechin's writing on operational art and operational planning.

This particularly fertile period of Soviet military innovation ended in 1937. Stalin's purges of the Soviet Army's officer corps between 1937 and 1938 effectively ended further

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<sup>45</sup> Kagan, "Army Doctrine and Modern War."

<sup>46</sup> G.S. Isserson, "The Evolution of Operational Art," in Harold Orenstein, *The Evolution of Soviet Operational Art, 1927-1991: The Documentary Basis, Volume I* (London: Frank Cass, 1995), 83.

<sup>47</sup> Harrison, *Architect of Soviet Victory*, 80.

<sup>48</sup> Soviet Army, *Provisional Field Regulations for the Red Army*, translated and released by the Foreign Broadcast Information Service (Springfield, VA: National Technical Information Service, U.S. Department of Commerce, 1986), 2.

<sup>49</sup> Harrison, *Architect of Soviet Victory*, 43.

<sup>50</sup> Svechin, *Strategy*, 2.

development of these ideas.<sup>51</sup> This interwar period of Soviet doctrinal development provided American doctrine writers of the late 1970s with a rich background of military thought from which to draw conclusions in their own efforts to reform and reorganize in the wake of Vietnam.

## **U.S. Army Reform**

The context of the U.S. Army's post-conflict period of innovation differed significantly from that of the Soviets. However, a direct link can be established between U.S. reform and Soviet military theory arising from Soviet reforms, despite differing circumstances. As the U.S. Army began to withdraw from Vietnam, immediately it began to reflect on its experiences in order to consider its future. Survival of the U.S. Army as an institution was at the forefront of the minds of U.S. Army leaders. This reflective period occurred in part because of the nature of democracy, changes in American society, and the condition of the economy. Congress sought to reduce government spending on the military and balked at funding any military modernization.<sup>52</sup>

Army leaders were concerned with rebuilding the force, transitioning to an All-Volunteer force, and preparing for the next war.<sup>53</sup> Civilian and military leadership felt that they had failed in Vietnam, albeit for different reasons. Tactical victories on the battlefield in Vietnam did not translate to strategic victory. This failure haunted the Army as it sought to internalize lessons during this reform and reorganization period. The Army needed to restore its credibility and

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<sup>51</sup> Otto Chaney, *Zhukov* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), 31. Over fifty percent of all brigade commanders and above were executed between May 1937 and November 1938. Voroshilov and Budenny survived as marshals while Tukhachevsky, Yegorov, and Blyukher were shot.

<sup>52</sup> Office of Management and Budget, *Table 15.5 – TOTAL GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURES BY MAJOR CATEGORY OF EXPENDITURE AS PERCENTAGES OF GDP: 1948–2010*, accessed at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/Historicals>, on 21 April 2011. As a percentage of GDP, defense spending dropped from 10% in 1968 to 5.4% in 1980. To give this a little perspective, spending on Social Security and Medicare was 5.5% in 1980.

<sup>53</sup> John Romjue, "Prepare the Army for War: A Historical Overview of the Army Training and Doctrine Command 1973-1978," *TRADOC Historical Study Series (Fort Monroe, VA: Military History Office, U.S. Training and Doctrine Command, 1998)*, 25.

prestige with the American public and the government.<sup>54</sup> Army leaders examined history and contemporary events in an effort to make sense of a world that was in many respects “turned upside down” from the one that they knew just ten short years before. Army scholars and leaders drew heavily from the interwar period between WWI and WWII, plus the Korean War, to focus on large-scale, conventional warfare.

The Army turned to the 1973 Yom Kippur War when it looked at contemporary events. In some respects, this focus on the Yom Kippur War in 1973 is understandable because this war saw the first use of several new technologies in battle. The Yom Kippur War was a high-tech conflict in which the numerically inferior Israeli Defense Force won. It provided a possible solution to the military problem in Europe, namely the discrepancy between the small U.S. and massive Soviet armies. The Yom Kippur War illustrated how a highly trained, technologically superior force could defeat an enemy that was numerically superior. More insidiously, it gave the U.S. Army a new professional reference point, “untainted by the Vietnam War,” that reflected their concerns over fighting the Soviets on the plains of Europe.<sup>55</sup> Forgetting about Vietnam eliminated any considerations other than major combat operations and simplified the Army’s predictions about the future.

The lessons learned from the study of the 1973 Yom Kippur War helped to justify Army demands for new weapons systems that were necessary to fight and win in a large-scale conventional war with the Soviet Union. The Army discovered a need to modernize its force at

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<sup>54</sup> In 1976, the Harris Public opinion showed that public confidence in the military had sunk to an all-time low of 23%, compared with a rating of 62% just ten years ago. The Harris Poll. Confidence in Leadership (Rochester: Harris Interactive, 2010), p. 6, <http://www.harrisinteractive.com/SearchResults.aspx?Search=confidence+in+leaders+of+institutions>, access 8 February 2010; Roger Spiller, “In the Shadow of the dragon: Doctrine and the US Army after Vietnam,” (RUSI Journal, 1997), 46. Roger Spiller attributes some of the decline to the overall decline in government confidence in the wake of Watergate. Regardless, the U.S. Army was suffering from a lack of credibility in the constituency that they were obligated to protect.

<sup>55</sup> Spiller, “In the Shadow of the Dragon,” 46; Andrew Krepenivich, *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1986), 272.

the same time it was rebuilding. Modernization efforts, tied to doctrinal and organizational reform, eventually yielded the M1 Abrams, the AH-64 and UH-60 helicopters, the Multiple Launch Rocket System (MLRS), the Bradley Fighting Vehicle, and shoulder fired Stinger air defense missile.<sup>56</sup> Computer systems and advanced communications systems helped with the control of large units and the coordination of fires.<sup>57</sup> Absorbing these new systems came with a cost, necessitated increased training, and demanded professional military education. However, their incorporation made it possible for the Army to develop new doctrine focused on maneuver, firepower and the close coordination of large units. These advances provided the technological underpinning for the revision of doctrine to what eventually became the 1982 version of *FM 100-5*.

The U.S. Army's period of post-conflict innovation began in 1973 with the creation of the Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC). During an era of "intellectual renaissance," U.S. Army officers vigorously debated how to reform and reorganize in order to meet future threats.<sup>58</sup> They argued over their experiences the last decade and wrestled with the potential impact of new technologies. General William DePuy, as the first commander of TRADOC, dominated initial reform efforts, specifically training and leader development doctrine, after Vietnam.<sup>59</sup> The lethality of the Yom Kippur War convinced General DePuy that victory in the next war would require the Army to win the first battle while fighting outnumbered. Officers began to train for their next job, outside educational opportunities were curtailed, and officers

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<sup>56</sup> Henry Gole, *General William E. DePuy: Preparing the Army for Modern War* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2008), 216.

<sup>57</sup> Jonathon House, *Combined Arms Warfare in the Twentieth Century* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2001), 254.

<sup>58</sup> Jeffrey Due, *Seizing the Initiative: The Intellectual Renaissance that Changed U.S. Army Doctrine, 1970-1982* (master's thesis, The University of North Carolina, 2009), 8.

<sup>59</sup> Spiller, "In the Shadow of the Dragon," 46; Gole, *General William E. DePuy*, 239. DePuy had three priority outcomes in mind: a revolution in training; clear expression of doctrine; and the integration and pacing of training and doctrine with combat developments.

were encouraged to focus effort solely at the tactical level.<sup>60</sup> Branch specific basic courses, advanced courses, and the Command and General Staff College all served to perpetuate a narrow focus on tactics. General DePuy appointed Gorman as his Deputy Chief of Staff for Training.<sup>61</sup> In this position, Brigadier General Gorman created the Army Training and Evaluation Program (ARTEP), a comprehensive task analysis of every critical task a fighting organization must perform in order to capitalize upon its combat power.<sup>62</sup> Brigadier General Gorman's ARTEP system provided the framework that supported the new doctrine in the 1976 edition of *FM 100-5*.

General DePuy's personal involvement in the writing of the 1976 edition of *FM 100-5* made it a reflection of his experiences and beliefs.<sup>63</sup> This edition was seen as the capstone document for all "how-to" manuals and the first doctrinal publication since the Vietnam War. The manual was intended to "shove the Army" away from Vietnam and towards the future by confronting the principle strategic threat facing the Army: a U.S. force quantitatively inferior in men and equipment on an armor dominated European battlefield.<sup>64</sup> Referred to as "Active

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<sup>60</sup> Arthur Coumbe, *Army Officer Development: Historical Context* (Fort Monroe, VA: U.S. Army Cadet Command, 2010), 9-14. After 1973, the U.S. Army began to emphasize a "back to the basics" approach to training. The Review of Education and Training For Officers (RETO) Report in 1978 stressed the importance of officers mastering the knowledge and skills that were unique to the military profession. The Professional Officer Development Study (PDOS) in 1985 further reinforced this approach by recommending that Army schools reorient instruction to produce technically and tactically proficient officers who possessed the "warrior spirit."

<sup>61</sup> Romjue, "Prepare the Army for War," 68.

<sup>62</sup> Spiller, "In the Shadow of the Dragon," 47.

<sup>63</sup> Specifically, his beliefs in the need to win the first battle of the next war and in utilizing new, lethal technology while fighting outnumbered.

<sup>64</sup> Attributed to General DePuy by Gole, *General William E. DePuy*, 258; Romjue, "Prepare the Army for War," 56. The new manual emphasized the need for the U.S. Army to prepare to "win the first battle of the next war." This edition was also an effort to demystify doctrine. Clausewitz, Sun Tzu, and the Principles of War were deliberately left out.

Defense,” this doctrine caused controversy in the Army. Writers challenged and debated it in professional journals in the 1970s.<sup>65</sup>

A parallel concern to the debate over modernization and training was the debate over the professionalization of the officer corps. The most influential writer during this period was Samuel Huntington with his civil-military theory of “objective control.”<sup>66</sup> Huntington’s theory drowned out those of other civil-military scholars in part because it fits with the uniquely American history of the U.S. Army’s service to the Nation.<sup>67</sup> U.S. Army leaders saw themselves as professionally responsible for the application of violence on behalf of the Nation. Their training made U.S. Army officers the most competent people to make decisions regarding how to use force. Therefore, in the ideal civil-military relationship, U.S. Army officers would be told objectives by the politicians and then be left alone to achieve those objectives. More importantly, Huntington’s theory proposed a distinct boundary between political decisions and military execution. This coincided with the U.S. Army’s desire to define its mission in a post-Vietnam world and limit what it perceived to be undue political involvement at the tactical level. The resultant operational level of war provided a clearly defined professional domain for U.S. Army officers free of political interference.

The high point of this period was the development and incorporation of the operational level of war into doctrine with the publication of the 1982 edition of *FM 100-5, Operations*. This new operational level of war became the Army’s central organizational principle for the creation of doctrine.<sup>68</sup> Equally important was its clarification of the civil-military relationship by creating

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 261; Spiller, “In the Shadow of the Dragon,” 47; Due, *Seizing the Initiative*, Table 2. According to Jeffrey Due, there were 139 articles in *Military Review* between 1976 and 1982 discussing doctrine, compared to just three between its first issue and 1975.

<sup>66</sup> Huntington, *Soldier and the State*, 83.

<sup>67</sup> Builder, *The Masks of War*, 38; Feaver, *Armed Servants*, 9.

<sup>68</sup> John Romjue, *The Army of Excellence: The Development of the 1980s Army*. (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 2004), 80.

a politics free zone, centered around tactics, placing a primacy on professional skill, which was accomplished by separating strategy from tactics.<sup>69</sup> It became the responsibility of the operational commander to translate strategy for his subordinate commanders. This bifurcation was seen as a mechanism to restore professional autonomy and prevent the kind of civilian interference experienced during Vietnam.

Active Defense lasted just six years before it was rewritten in 1982 because of General Starry's experiences in Europe and the intense debate of the late 1970s. This edition introduced the AirLand Battle concept and the operational level of war.<sup>70</sup> Supported by weapons development programs in the 1970s that fielded an entirely new generation of modern weaponry, AirLand Battle reflected the Army's intellectual renaissance and provided a blueprint for how the Army would fight train and organize.<sup>71</sup> The AirLand Battle Concept was offensively focused and a "deliberate attempt to return the Army to its primary focus of preparing to fight a large European land war against the Soviets."<sup>72</sup> This operational concept completed the institutional Army's rejection of Vietnam and reinforced a reorganization and educational reform that began in the 1970s. It maintained the focus on the heavy division as the primary tactical organization of the U.S. Army. The corps logically became the principle operational level for organization, and therefore it was the centerpiece of this new doctrine.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> This is unique to the American innovations. As stated previously, an apolitical military was anathema to the Soviet system of government.

<sup>70</sup> "Army doctrine connoted, at its heart and center, the operational level and vision – the operational art." John Romjue, *American Army Doctrine for the Post-Cold War* (Washington, DC: Military History Office, 1997), 3; *FM 100-5, Operations* (1982), 7-1. The operational level was one of the fundamentals of AirLand Battle doctrine.

<sup>71</sup> Romjue, *The Army of Excellence*, 3; House. *Combined Arms Warfare*, 251-253.

<sup>72</sup> Janine Davidson, *Lifting the Fog of Peace: How Americans Learned to Fight Modern War* (Ann Arbor, MI: the University of Michigan Press, 2010), 195.

<sup>73</sup> Romjue, *The Army of Excellence*, 85-86.

The 1982 version of *FM 100-5* introduced the operational level of war as the level that “uses available military resources to attain strategic goals within a theater of war.”<sup>74</sup> The influence of Soviet writing is clearly seen in the focus on sustained operations, simultaneous and sequential battles, and the emphasis on depth in space and time.<sup>75</sup> American doctrine writers translated Soviet doctrine to a discrete operational level because of their perspective on military art and tactics based upon their military education and experiences.<sup>76</sup>

By time the 1986 version of *FM 100-5* was published, AirLand Battle was synonymous with the operational level of war.<sup>77</sup> The operational level of war was initially identified as one of the fundamentals of AirLand Battle in 1982.<sup>78</sup> The Corps Systems Program Review, a doctrinal conference held by the U.S. Army Combined Arms Center in 1983, continued to shift the Army’s focus from the tactical to the operational level. TRADOC’s AirLand Battle Study confirmed the tenets of AirLand Battle as an operational level doctrine with the corps as its centerpiece. Doctrine writers also recognized the need to inculcate the operational level in the force through training in the AirLand Battle operational concept.<sup>79</sup> By 1986, the Army was reorganizing its forces around the corps and Army schools were teaching AirLand Battle and the operational level of war as integrated concepts.

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<sup>74</sup> *FM 100-5, Operations* (1982) 2-3.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-3.

<sup>76</sup> Richard Swain, “Filling the Void: The Operational Art and the U.S. Army” in B.J.C. McKercher and Michael Hennessey, ed. *Operational Art: Developments in the Theories of War* (New York, NY: Praeger Publishers, 1996), 147-149; Huba Wass de Czege. “Thinking and Acting Like an Early Explorer: Operational Art is Not a Level of War,” *Small Wars Journal* (Summer 2011) accessed online at <http://smallwarsjournal.com>, on 15 March 2011.

<sup>77</sup> Scales, *Certain Victory*, 26; Suzanne Neilsen. “An Army Transformed: The U.S. Army’s Post-Vietnam Recovery and the Dynamics of Change in Military Organizations,” *The Letort Papers* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2010), 48. In 1982, the School of Advanced Military Studies was created to serve a twofold purpose: to train officers to perform on staffs in this new operational level and to instill a common cultural bias throughout the Army centered on the doctrine of AirLand Battle.

<sup>78</sup> *FM 100-5, Operations* (1982), 7-1.

<sup>79</sup> Romjue, *The Army of Excellence*, 86-88.



The 1986 version of *FM 100-5* introduced operational art into the Army's doctrinal lexicon. It defined operational art as "the employment of military forces to attain strategic goals in a theater of war or theater of operations through the design, organization, and conduct of campaigns and major operations."<sup>80</sup> This edition codified three distinct levels of war: military strategy, operational art, and tactics.<sup>81</sup> However, throughout the 1986 version, there were repeated references to the operational level of war.<sup>82</sup> The 1986 definition of operational art has remarkable similarities to the 1982 definition of the operational level. This further suggests that Army doctrine writers viewed the terms as interchangeable. It was because of this confusion in terminology in the 1986 edition that operational art and a discrete operational level inhabited by the corps formation became intertwined. In effect, the practice of operational art in the U.S. Army became tied to the operational level of war.

This happened because the U.S. Army attempted to isolate Soviet efforts to reform and modernize in the interwar period from their strategic and political context. The Soviet concept of operational art is an extension of the Clausewitzian conception of the interaction between strategy and tactics.<sup>83</sup> Soviet operational art ensured the seamless integration of strategy and tactics at every echelon of command. The U.S. Army's concept of the operational level of war seeks to separate strategy from tactics as a result of their frustrations over the conduct of the Vietnam War. The desire to prevent undue political influence at the tactical level had a powerful effect on how Soviet ideas were adapted. This resulted in the creation of a discrete operational level of war

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<sup>80</sup> Department of the Army, *FM 100-5, Operations* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1986), 9.

<sup>81</sup> "Military strategy, operational art and tactics are the broad division of activity in preparing for and conducting war." *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 59-74. Chapter 4 specifically references the operational level when discussing sustainment and logistics.

<sup>83</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, 81.

in the 1982 edition of *FM 100-5*. The remainder of this monograph will assess the usefulness of the operational level of war.

## Methodology

This monograph will use case studies to contrast the concept of the operational level of war reflected in the 1982 edition of *FM 100-5* with the realities of operations in the post-Cold War world. The case studies will accomplish two tasks. First, the studies will determine if commanders utilized operational art through the development of campaign plans regardless of echelon. Second, they will provide analysis of how the commander linked tactical action to the achievement of strategic objectives. Both issues are important because the application of operational art has become indicative of whether or not a commander acts operationally. A campaign plan that successfully links tactical action to strategic objectives is a critical output in the planning process. If the realities of operations in the Post-Cold War world contradict the doctrine, then the usefulness of the operational level of war in the planning and conduct of war can be questioned.

The cases studies include Operation Desert Storm, Operational Joint Endeavor, and Operation Palliser. All three case studies selected for comparison took place after the adoption of the operational level of war in 1982 and its inculcation into the fielded force and the forces of key U.S. allies by 1990. Indoctrination and development of a “common operational bias” requires time to educate leaders, train the force, and integrate new equipment into the new doctrinal setting.<sup>84</sup> Selecting cases from after 1990 allows for the development of a common cultural bias

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<sup>84</sup> Scales, *Certain Victory*, 47; Due, *Seizing the Initiative*, 36. The U.S. Army Command and Staff College began teaching the new doctrine in the 1983 academic year. The first school-trained officers joined staffs in 1984, and the first officers to receive school training would assume command in three or four more years.

within the force and removes the hindsight bias that would inevitably result from the use of older historical cases.

Two additional criteria were used to select quality cases for the comparison. The selection of cases spanned the “spectrum of conflict” and did not focus exclusively on high intensity or major combat operations.<sup>85</sup> This allows for the assessment of validity in operations of varying duration and intensity. Additionally, the case studies needed enough scholarly work written to allow for an in-depth understanding of the case study using multiple sources. Finally, subjective bias was limited as much by eliminating case studies in which the author personally participated.<sup>86</sup>

Two nations, the United States and Britain, had formally acknowledged and were teaching the operational level of war in their professional military education by 1990. These two countries conducted over thirty named operations between 1990 and 2010. After considering available readings and eliminating those in which the author had personal involvement, three were selected from those remaining. The first case is Operation Desert Storm. The second case is Operation Joint Endeavor, the operations in Bosnia starting with ground intervention in 1995. The final case, Operation Palliser, is the British armed intervention into Sierra Leone in 2000, which began as a Non-combatant Evacuation Operation (NEO). Operation Palliser is important because it illustrates the British military attempt to apply doctrine that incorporates the operational level of war. These three cases also span the spectrum of conflict from major combat operations on one end to peace enforcement operations on other.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> “The spectrum of conflict is the backdrop for Army operations. The spectrum of conflict uses violence as a discriminator on an ascending scale that ranges from stable peace to general war. On the left hand of the spectrum, stable peace represents an operational environment characterized by the absence of militarily significant violence. On the right hand of the spectrum, general war describes an environment dominated by interstate and intrastate violence.” FM 3-0, *Operations* (2010) para 2-1.

<sup>86</sup> This eliminated operations in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as Operation Joint Guardian in Kosovo.

<sup>87</sup> FM 3-0, *Operations* (2010), para. 2-1.

The evaluation criteria will compare the three selected cases. The purpose of this evaluation is to consider aspects unique to the operational level of war described in 1982 U.S. Army doctrine, which defined the operational level of war as follows: “The operational level of war uses available military resources to attain strategic goals within a theater of war. Most simply, it is the theory of larger unit operations. It also involves planning and conducting campaigns.”<sup>88</sup> Considering the echelon of command where political involvement occurred in decision-making is useful to assessing the validity of a discrete operational level inhabited by the corps and army formations in U.S. Army doctrine.

In 1986, the U.S. Army defined operational art as “the employment of military forces to attain strategic goals in a theater of war or theater of operations through the design, organization, and conduct of campaigns and major operations.”<sup>89</sup> As previously mentioned, operational art is tied to the operational level of war because the terms were intermingled in the 1986 edition of *FM 100-5*. Therefore, determining what echelon of command utilized operational art in each case study is useful to assessing the accuracy of doctrine. Evaluating campaign plans and operational objectives is useful to assessing the application of operational art. For these reasons, the following questions are addressed in all three case studies and tentative conclusions are drawn for each.

- (1) What echelon of command practiced operational art and where did political involvement occur?

The echelon of command is important because it addresses a key aspect of the U.S. Army’s conception of the operational level of war and who practices operational art. In both Soviet and American thought there was a ‘lowest level’ of command, which practiced operational art. Soviet Army doctrine held that operational art was practiced by front commanders, while the

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<sup>88</sup> *FM 100-5, Operations* (1982), 2-3.

<sup>89</sup> *FM 100-5, Operations* (1986), 10.

U.S. Army doctrine lowered this level of participation to the Army or Corps commander.<sup>90</sup>

Evidence that commanders at lower echelons employ operational art would tend to argue against it being tied to the operational level of war. By extension, such employment argues against the operational level as a discrete echelon. Therefore, identifying the ‘operational’ commander in each case study is critical to assessing the accuracy of U.S. Army doctrine.

Unique to the U.S Army’s understanding of the operational level of war is its function as a filter between strategic decision makers and tactical commanders. The purpose of Soviet operational art was to ensure the seamless integration of strategy and tactics at every echelon. In both Soviet and U.S. doctrine, it is the responsibility of operational commanders to take strategic objectives and translate them into operational objectives for their subordinate commanders. In U.S. doctrine this function comes with an assumption that political involvement in decision making will end with operational level commander. Tactical commanders are protected from unnecessary political interference in the conduct of operations. However, considering where political decision makers are involved provides another way to assess the relevancy of an operational level of war as it is currently conceived in U.S. doctrine. This is important because of the expectation that the operational level of war serve as a filter for political involvement that occurs at a tactical level.

(2) Was a campaign plan developed to support the operation’s military objectives?

In U.S Army doctrine the application of operational art results in the development of a campaign plan that synchronizes and integrates operations by defining objectives, establishing command relationships, and describing concepts of operations and sustainment.<sup>91</sup> Therefore, the presence of a campaign plan is a good indicator of whether or not the commander was thinking and acting operationally. The development of a campaign plan during the course of operations

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<sup>90</sup> Romjue, *The Army of Excellence*, 65.

<sup>91</sup> *FM 3-0, Operations* (2010), Chapter 5.

would also indicate the commander's recognition of the need to think operationally. A tactical commander's utilization of operational art would help to shed light on the accuracy of doctrine.

(3) Were the operation's military objectives linked to the overall strategic objectives?

This is important because it addresses the purpose of an operational level commander. In U.S. Army doctrine the operational commander is responsible for ensuring that the conduct of discrete tactical actions achieves strategic objectives. Operational commanders provide this linkage between tactical action and strategic objectives. Analyzing the objectives of each operation provides a basis for assessing whether or not the commander applied operational art in solving his problem. If the commander performing this function was not a corps level commander then it would question the validity of the current construct.

After review of all three cases, the answers to each question are compared in order to determine if there were any underlying themes. Finally, a short summary of the results at the end of this section will answer the overall research question and set the stage for the final section.

## **ANALYSIS OF CASE STUDIES**

### **Operation Desert Storm**

In the early morning hours of 2 August 1990, Sadaam Hussein invaded the country of Kuwait. In less than forty-eight hours, Iraqi forces seized the entire country and staged along the Saudi Arabian border. The U.S. response began almost immediately with the deployment of elements of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division to Saudi Arabia. The initial focus of operations was the defense of Saudi Arabia and the buildup of sufficient forces to go on the offensive against Iraq. In just under 90 days, the U.S. deployed over 184,000 soldiers, airmen, and marines into theater in preparation for combat operations.<sup>92</sup> Allied forces also deployed to Saudi Arabia with Britain,

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<sup>92</sup> Scales, *Certain Victory*, 59.

France, and several Arab nations all contributing combat forces. By early January 1991, coalition forces were ready to begin the offensive and restore Kuwaiti sovereignty.

The final operations order was published in early January and Operation Desert Storm officially began the morning of 17 January 1991, with the start of the air campaign. The initial focus of combat operations was the destruction of strategic targets and the establishment of air superiority while ground forces continued to plan, prepare and rehearse for combat operations. Combat power continued to arrive in theater and tactical commanders continued to refine their plans. In the middle of February, the focus for air operations began to shift to the destruction of Iraqi tactical units in preparation for future operations. The air campaign remained the focus for operations until the start of ground combat operations on 24 February.<sup>93</sup>

The ground attack plan was a complex consisting of a main attack, three supporting attacks, a demonstration, a feint, and an economy of force.<sup>94</sup> VII Corps was designated as the main effort for the attack to destroy the Iraqi operational center of gravity, their famed Republican Guard divisions. The purpose of VII Corps was to envelop the western Iraqi defenses and destroy the Republican Guard division in northern Kuwait.<sup>95</sup> There were three supporting attacks against the main defensive positions of the Iraqi Army in order to fix them in position.<sup>96</sup> The 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division conducted a feint up the Wadi al Batin in order to deceive the Iraqi Army and conceal the location of the main attack.<sup>97</sup> The 5<sup>th</sup> Marine Expeditionary Brigade

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<sup>93</sup> Michael Gordon and Bernard Trainor, *The General's War* (New York, NY: Backbay Books, 1995), 355.

<sup>94</sup> John Brown, "The Maturation of Operational Art, Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm" in *Historical Perspectives of the Operational Art* edited by Michael Krause and R. Phillips (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 2005), 459.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 462-462. The 2<sup>nd</sup> ACR, 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Armored Division conducted the famous "left hook" to bypass Iraqi defenses.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 460. Two divisions of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Expeditionary Force and coalition forces attacked the main defenses in order to fix Iraqi forces in position.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 460. The feint deceived 5 Iraqi divisions. After withdrawing from the feint, 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division fell in behind the main attack and became the operational reserve.

conducted a demonstration in the Persian Gulf to convince the Iraqi Army that an amphibious assault was imminent.<sup>98</sup> The XVIII Corps was the economy of force mission responsible for guarding the left flank of the main attack.<sup>99</sup> Iraqi forces were overwhelmed by the concerted operations of coalition forces and within one hundred hours, the battle was over.<sup>100</sup> Iraq signed the cease-fire agreement at Safwan on 3 March 1991.

## Analysis

The Joint Task Force (JTF) Commander, General Norman Schwarzkopf, was also the ground force commander for Operation Desert Storm. The Third Army Commander, General Yeosock, was a tactical commander as were the VII and XVII Corps commanders. The JTF also developed the campaign plan for the overall operations with the subordinate commanders focusing strictly on the tactical employment of forces. This is in accordance with U.S. Army doctrine of the time.

General Schwarzkopf and his staff were the primary conduits between the U.S. National Command Authority and the subordinate tactical commanders. The JTF headquarters was responsible for synchronizing tactical actions with their strategic guidance. General Schwarzkopf communicated daily with Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Colin Powell, during the initial stages of the crisis.<sup>101</sup> Additionally, General Schwarzkopf briefed the President and members of the Cabinet several times in the course of the first two weeks as well. General Schwarzkopf remained in constant contact after he moved his headquarters and planning staff to Saudi Arabia. Because of his frequent

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 460. The resulted in the Iraqi Army devoting 4 division to the defense of the coast in order to protect their seaward flank.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 462. Elements of the 101<sup>st</sup> conducted a heliborne attack all the way to the Euphrates River in order to prevent the Iraqi withdrawal of forces.

<sup>100</sup> Scales, *Certain Victory*, 316.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 101.



communication and General Colin Powell's support, political leaders had limited impact on tactical commanders during the campaign. By doing this, General Schwarzkopf was fulfilling his role as the operational commander as it is expressed in U.S. Army doctrine. President Bush's clearly articulated strategic objectives facilitated General Schwarzkopf because they were stated early and did not change.

On 5 August 1990, President George H.W. Bush stated the overall strategic objectives in the Persian Gulf were to:

- (a) effect the immediate, complete, and unconditional withdrawal of all Iraqi forces from Kuwait;
- (b) restore Kuwait's legitimate government;
- (c) ensure the security and stability of Saudi Arabia and other Persian Gulf nations; and
- (d) ensure the safety of American citizens abroad.<sup>102</sup>

These strategic objectives remained consistent throughout the planning and conduct of Operation Desert Storm. President Bush focused on the restoration of legitimate government and stability in the region. Initial military planning focused on the defense of Saudi Arabia as the U.S. built up combat power in the region. President Bush authorized offensive operations to compel Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait in November 1990, but his strategic focus remained unchanged.<sup>103</sup>

General Schwarzkopf and his staff published an operations order before the start of the air campaign on 17 January 1991 that clearly laid out the military objectives for the upcoming campaign. Offensive operations focused on the following objectives:

- (a) attack Iraqi political/military leadership and command and control (C2);
- (b) gain and maintain air superiority;
- (c) sever Iraqi supply lines;

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<sup>102</sup> Government Accounting Office, *Operation Desert Storm: Evaluation of the Air Campaign*, NSAID 97-134 (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1997), 194.

<sup>103</sup> Richard Swain. "Lucky War": Third Army in Desert Storm (Fort Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1994), 90.

(d) destroy chemical, biological, and nuclear capability; and

(e) destroy Republican Guard forces.<sup>104</sup>

The overall campaign occurred in four phases: the strategic air phase, attainment of air superiority phase, battlefield preparation phase, and the ground offensive phase.<sup>105</sup> The plan integrated all the available military forces into simultaneous and sequential operations in order to defeat Iraqi forces. Offensive fires applied depth through the extensive use of airpower. Deception was a critical component of the plan and the western envelopment was conducted to out-maneuver the enemy after he was fixed to the south by coalition and USMC forces.

When compared to the previously stated strategic objectives developed by President Bush, it is clear that General Schwarzkopf's military objectives did not fully correlate to the strategy objectives.<sup>106</sup> The strategic objectives were focused on stability and the restoration of Kuwaiti sovereignty, meaning coalition ground forces effectively stopped at the Iraq-Kuwait border, while the military objectives were focused on the destruction of Iraq's military and its offensive capability. Because most of this capability remained inside of Iraq, U.S. troops were forced to continue sustained attacks deep into Iraq in order to achieve the stated military objectives.

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<sup>104</sup> GAO, *Operation Desert Storm*, 195.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 195-196.

<sup>106</sup> Several authors contend that President Bush's public statements supported GEN Schwarzkopf's military objectives. However, in reviewing all of President Bush's speeches, the author can only find one speech, on 17 JAN 1990, where he specifically references WMD and the removal of Sadaam Hussein. The problem with this speech is that it occurred after the start of the air campaign and after the publication of the OPOD detailing the military objectives. Therefore, it is impossible to use this speech as justification for military planning. It is more likely that this is a case of operational planning guiding strategic statements especially in light of the fact that President Bush stopped the war at the Iraqi border. Scales, *Certain Victory*, 253; Gordon, *The General's War*, 144.

## Conclusions

Operation Desert Storm supports 1982 U.S. doctrine and understanding of a separate operational level of war.<sup>107</sup> Input from national leaders was directed to General Schwarzkopf, and he had the subsequent responsibility to translate this into operational guidance for his tactical commanders. General Schwarzkopf and his headquarters developed a clear campaign plan for offensive operations. However, the operational objectives set forth were not linked to the publically stated regional strategic objectives. In this instance, an operational level of war in line with U.S. Army doctrine is clearly seen but the application of operational art was incomplete. The next case study will analyze the usefulness of the operational level of war in a U.S. peace enforcement operation.

## Operation Joint Endeavor

Bosnia was a test case for the credibility of the U.S. Army after a series of failed interventions in Somalia and Haiti.<sup>108</sup> It was also a landmark for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) because it was their first ground operation outside of the alliance treaty area.<sup>109</sup> The United States down-sized its military in the wake of Operation Desert Storm and the intervention in Somalia, and was reluctant to become involved in an operation that did not have a clear and timely end state. Therefore, the Dayton Accords and the subsequent UN Security

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<sup>107</sup> FM 100-5, 2-3.

<sup>108</sup> James Dobbins et al., editors, *America's Role in Nation-Building: From Germany to Iraq* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2003) xx, accessed online at <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/carl/Doc?id=10056204> on 15 March 2011.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 96.; U.S. Army Europe, *AE Pam 525-100, Military Operations: The U.S. Army in Bosnia and Herzegovina* (Heidelberg, Germany: U.S. Army Europe, 2003), 21.

Council Resolution establishing the International Force (IFOR) limited the time frame to one year although many participants knew required more time.<sup>110</sup>

The Army's initial planning for Bosnia throughout the end of 1995 was characterized as chaotic.<sup>111</sup> The U.S. Army (Europe) (USAREUR) deferred most of the initial planning effort to V Corps because of other obligations that were ongoing. The resulting plans were not nested between headquarters. V Corps coordinated with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) because Bosnia was a NATO operation and they were nominally in charge. However, V Corps as USAREUR forward was determined to keep a U.S. Army hand in the planning and execution of the operations.<sup>112</sup> The First Armored Division (1<sup>st</sup> AD) was the designated American contribution to ground operations and began to plan for future operations. All of this resulted in complex and contradictory deployment plans.<sup>113</sup>

On 31 December 1995, the 1<sup>st</sup> AD finally crossed the Sava River into Bosnia, occupied their Area of Operations (AO) and began a peace enforcement mission by establishing a Zone of Separation (ZOS) between the two warring factions.<sup>114</sup> The initial IFOR mandate as well as U.S. strategic objectives, limited the involvement of military forces to strictly military missions. Non-military missions such as law-enforcement, the establishment of basic services and the re-establishment of a functioning economy were the responsibility of other parties.<sup>115</sup> This resulted in a significant delay between the establishment of security and the start of civil reconstruction.

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 93; Robert Baumann et al, *Armed Peacekeepers in Bosnia* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 2004), 100.

<sup>111</sup> Baumann, *Armed Peacekeepers*, 73.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 74. NATO protested the involvement of an American corps to oversee a single division but V Corps responded that they had a Title 10 responsibility to oversee the deployment and return of 1<sup>st</sup> AD to Bosnia, thus allowing them to keep a hand in planning and operations.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 77. Aggressive planning by four separate commands resulted in four competing force packages being entered into JOPES, which almost prevented the deployment of the 1<sup>st</sup> AD.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>115</sup> Dobbins, *America's Role in Nation-Building*, 93; Baumann, *Armed Peacekeepers*, 100.

The resultant vacuum in law enforcement capability allowed for the establishment of organized criminal elements that further contributed to instability and insecurity.<sup>116</sup> When the UN mandate expired in December 1996, very little progress had been made along any civilian lines of effort.

When the UN mandate expired in December 1996, NATO forces remained and became the Security Force (SFOR) rather than IFOR.<sup>117</sup> The stability of the region remained predicated upon continued international involvement in conflict resolution. Civilian objectives in the region have not been met and organized crime remains a significant problem. The United States met its initial goal of establishing security in the region using military force but its long-term goals of stabilization and the reintegration of warring parties into the political process remains unfulfilled.<sup>118</sup>

## Analysis

As previously stated, in U.S. Army doctrine the lowest echelon that practices operational art is the Corps. By extension, this is the lowest level that is commonly understood to be operational. The nucleus of Task Force Eagle was 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division under the command of Major General Nash. There was no American Corps in Bosnia, 1<sup>st</sup> AD was under the control of the ARRC; however, the nature of American involvement meant that Major General Nash operated using two separate command structures – the NATO command structure and the American structure in which he was the highest American commander in the AO.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>117</sup> *AE Pam 525-100, Military Operations: The U.S. Army in Bosnia and Herzegovina* (Heidelberg, Germany: U.S. Army Europe, 2003), 21. The European Union assumed responsibility for maintaining security from NATO in 2004 and still maintains a presence today.

<sup>118</sup> Dobbins, *America's Role in Nation-Building*, 93.

<sup>119</sup> *AE Pam 525-100*, 16.

Another key tenet of U.S. doctrine and operational art is its “jointness.”<sup>120</sup> TF Eagle was not “joint” in the strict definition of the term because it did not have additional U.S. forces assigned outside of the Army.<sup>121</sup> However, it was a coalition force consisting of fourteen brigades and forty-two battalions with a total force over 22,500 personnel. This force was predominately American, but it did have a sizeable contingent of forces from ten other countries.<sup>122</sup> As a division commander, Major General Nash was a tactical commander by U.S. Army doctrine. Because of the coalition-nature of his force, he operated as an operational level of command.

During the initial stages of planning for the ground intervention, political input was primarily with the V Corps and EUCOM commands and staffs. 1<sup>st</sup> AD received guidance from their higher headquarters in Germany. There was minimal interaction between the 1<sup>st</sup> AD commander and the civilian decision-makers in Washington, DC. Therefore, it appeared that the V Corps and USAREUR staffs performed their function as a filter at the operational level during the initial stages of planning for Bosnia.

However, the situation changed as soon as ground operations started. V Corps remained in Croatia and 1<sup>st</sup> AD was the only American command in Bosnia. In theory, Major General Nash responded solely to his NATO chain of command for the conduct of operations. In reality, Major General Nash was drawn into discussions of policy and strategy with U.S. political leaders because of his position as the most senior U.S. commander in the AO. Once TF Eagle was established in Tuzla, MG Nash’s interaction with political leaders, both U.S. and NATO, continued as operations progressed. As a result, Major General Nash was making decisions as a

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<sup>120</sup> “Campaigns are inherently joint and the lowest level to practice operational art is the Joint Force Commander.” JP 3-0, *Operations* (Norfolk, VA: Joint Forces Command, 2010), III-7.

<sup>121</sup> JP 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Norfolk, VA: Joint Forces Command, March 2011) The JP definition of joint – “connotes activities, operations, organizations, etc., in which elements of two or more Military Departments participate.” However, TF Eagle was a composite organization of forces from more than two nations.

<sup>122</sup> Baumann, *Armed Peacekeepers*, 94. U.S. force caps limited U.S. forces to 20,000 personnel in Bosnia, the remainder came from coalition partners.

tactical ground force commander, which would normally be reserved for higher echelons of command because he had no higher U.S. headquarters in Bosnia.

EUCOM and V Corps developed the initial plan establishing the initial military objectives for the ground force. USAREUR supported both planning efforts. The 1<sup>st</sup> AD conducted primarily tactical planning inside of the guidance that they received from their higher headquarters. There was no campaign plan developed by the V Corps or USAREUR since this was seen a limited operation to establish a ZOS and prevent the resumption of hostilities. TF Eagle was focused tactically during their initial operations.

TF Eagle's outlook began to change as they took control of their area of operations (AO). In order to achieve civil objectives, lower levels were required to expand their mission and develop campaign plans to coordinate actions along multiple lines of effort. Maintaining security required TF Eagle to do more than just enforce the ZOS. TF Eagle also conducted inspections of cantonment areas. In an effort to find a way to get both sides to work together, TF Eagle established the Joint Military Commission (JMC) mandated by the UN resolution to help orchestrate the separation of forces and build confidence between the disputing parties. The JMC remained a component of TF Eagle's communication effort throughout their operations and subordinate commanders conducted similar meetings in their areas of operation.<sup>123</sup> TF Eagle's need to generate a campaign plan meant that they were utilizing operational art in order to achieve their assigned objectives. The same was true for their subordinate units.

The initial military objectives of the operation were tied to the broad strategic objective to stop the killing of innocent people from sectarian strife by implementing the Dayton Accords.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 99, 101.

<sup>124</sup> Dobbins, *America's Role in Nation-Building*, 93. UNSCR 1031 established IFOR's primary tasks to establish a durable cessation of hostilities, ensure force protection, and establish lasting security and arms control measures.

However, the lack of a clear political end state made it difficult to nest their military objectives.<sup>125</sup>

Initial military operations focused solely on the military objectives without consideration for how they would influence civil objectives. As the situation matured and the political objectives evolved, linking military objectives to the achievement of civil objectives became more difficult. The lack of military involvement in critical IFOR tasks had negative consequences for reconstruction and crime.<sup>126</sup> As a result, the military objectives were never fully nested with the political ones.

## Conclusions

Major General Nash and his command had to develop a de facto campaign plan to support both military and non-military operations in order to achieve evolving political objectives. As a result, Major General Nash and his command were clearly operating at the operational level of war, despite the fact that he was “only” a division commander. This contradicts the idea of a discrete operational level inhabited by the corps formation in U.S. Army doctrine. TF Eagle was also a coalition force composed of units from eleven different nations. The nature of coalition operations required Major General Nash to integrate political expectations and constraints for several different nations into his planning. Subordinate commanders had to create their own campaign plan, which indicates the application of operational art at an echelon below the operational level of war.

Operation Joint Endeavor also contradicted American expectations of the operational level of war. In this case study MG Nash was in frequent communication with civilian members of the American government creating a dialogue that helped to shape the nature of operations in

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<sup>125</sup> Baumann, *Armed Peacekeepers*, 84.

<sup>126</sup> Dobbins, *America's Role in Nation-Building*, 96. Several critical tasks were not conducted by IFOR to include: the arrest of known war criminals, the re-establishment and training of local police forces, and the restoration of essential public services.



Bosnia. However, his headquarters failed to serve as a filter for subordinate units and interaction between military and civilian organizations occurred at the lowest levels. Because of the evolving nature of the operation, the political leadership of NATO and the United States routinely scrutinized brigade and battalion actions. This contradicts U.S. Army doctrine about the limitation of political interaction to the operational level of war. The final case study will analyze a British military attempt to apply doctrine that incorporates the operational level of war.

### **Operation Palliser – British forces**

The United Nations deployed peacekeeping forces to Sierra Leone in October 1999 after the signing of Lome Peace Accord between rebel forces, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), and government of Sierra Leone.<sup>127</sup> In the agreement, both sides agreed to a disarmament, demobilization, and rehabilitation (DDR) campaign to be overseen by the United Nations. Sierra Leone was a test case of the credibility of the UN after a series of traumas in the mid-1990s.<sup>128</sup> The United Nations established the UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) on 22 October 1999.<sup>129</sup> Almost immediately, Sierra Leone spiraled into civil war with factions fighting each other and the UN forces. This continued into 2000 with rebel forces staging several successful attacks against UN forces as they attempted to conduct the disarmament operations. In the first week of May 2000, over 500 UN personnel were detained or isolated by RUF forces.<sup>130</sup> It was in this context that Operation Palliser, a unilateral British intervention, was launched.

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<sup>127</sup> Patrick Evoe, *Operation Palliser: the British military intervention into Sierra Leone, a case of a successful use of Western military interdiction in a sub-Sahara African civil war* (Master's Thesis: Texas State University-San Marcos, 2008), 57.

<sup>128</sup> Stuart Griffin, *Joint Operations: A Short History* (London: Ministry of Defense, 2005), 196. High profile failures in Somalia, Rwanda and Bosnia meant UN was low.

<sup>129</sup> Evoe, *Operation Palliser*, 57. UNSCR 1270 authorized troop strength of 6,000 to be comprised of 3,000 Nigerian, 2,000 Indians, and 1,000 Guineans.

<sup>130</sup> Griffin, *Joint Operations*, 202.

Operation Palliser allowed the British to demonstrate their recently created Joint Rapid Reaction Force (JRRF) as well as their ambitious new peacekeeping doctrine.<sup>131</sup> Originally, conceived as a Non-combatant Evacuation operation, it quickly transitioned to a broader mission to support UN forces and improve the security situation in Sierra Leone. On 5 May 2000, Brigadier David Richards, the commander of the British Joint Task Force Headquarters, was ordered to deploy and evacuate British, Commonwealth and European Union nationals.<sup>132</sup> Within 24 hours, Brigadier Richards and the Operational Liaison and Reconnaissance Team deployed to Sierra Leone. On 7 May, the spearhead battalion of the JRRF, consisting of 1 Battalion, the Parachute Regiment and four Chinooks, arrived securing the airport at Lungi and the surrounding area. This set the condition for the execution of subsequent NEO operations. On the same day, the Royal Navy's Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) was ordered to Sierra Leone from the Mediterranean along with the aircraft carrier *HMS Illustrious* from Lisbon.

Once these initial conditions were established, Brigadier Richards met with local leadership to include the British Ambassador, the Commander of UNAMSIL forces, and representatives of the Sierra Leone military and government. He gained a better understanding of the situation in Sierra Leone and recognized that there existed a unique opportunity to bolster UNAMSIL forces and the Sierra Leone Army (SLA), stabilize the situation and potentially end the civil war. British liaison teams were dispatched to UNAMSIL and SLA units to assist them in planning operations and to provide a clear means of communicating between forces. British forces were dispatched to bolster the existing defenses. Then Brigadier Richards met with various armed factions around Freetown in order to convince them to not intervene in the situation. These actions served to prevent the escalation of violence and restore confidence to the population in and around Freetown. The Ambassador ordered the evacuation of non-combatants on May 8 and

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 196-197, 203.

<sup>132</sup> Evoe, *Operation Palliser*, 61.

within 48 hours over 499 personnel were evacuated.<sup>133</sup> British actions in support of local forces led to the eventual capture of the RUF leader, Foday Sankoh, on 17 May by a local militia commander.<sup>134</sup>

British forces continued to support UNAMSIL and SLA operations throughout May. The 42 Commando relieved the British Paras on 30 May 2000. Their mission consisted of supporting operations, securing the release of the UN hostages and training SLA units in order to improve their capacity to defeat the RUF.<sup>135</sup> Operation Palliser officially ended on 15 June with the departure of Brigadier Richards' forces. A small contingent of personnel remained to core of the new Short Term Training Teams (STTT) that would continue training SLA forces. UNAMSIL and SLA forces continued to conduct operations against rebel forces.

## Analysis

Brigadier Richards was in command of a brigade-sized element as the Ground Force Commander. This force consisted of elements of the Special Air Service, the Parachute Regiment and later the Royal Marine Commandos, which eventually grew to over 5,000 personnel. Therefore, using existing U.S. doctrine, Brigadier Richards was a tactical commander. However, it is clear that he was acting as the operational commander throughout Operation Palliser.

In U.S. Army doctrine political input theoretically stops with the JTF commander and it is his responsibility to translate this guidance into operational objectives for his subordinate commanders. However, political leaders are often involved in decision-making at a lower level when the operation conducted falls short of major combat operations. When this happens, ground force commanders make politically influenced decisions that are normally reserved for a higher

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<sup>133</sup> Griffin, *Joint Operations* This number is disputed by other sources; Evoe, *Operation Palliser*, 63, claims it was only 299.

<sup>134</sup> Woods, *Military Intervention in Sierra Leone*, 63.

<sup>135</sup> Griffin, *Joint Operations*, 213; Woods, *Military Intervention in Sierra Leone*, 64.

level of command. This is what happened in Operation Palliser. The British government was communicating directly with Brigadier Richards headquarters maintaining a dialogue as the situation developed.

Brigadier Richards made several decisions with strategic implications early in the operation before reliable communications were established with London. He decided to reinforce UNAMSIL and Sierra Leone Army forces around Freetown in order to prevent the collapse of the UN mission. This decision was beyond the scope of his initial task and risked drawing the UK into wider conflict with RUF forces, clearly not what the U.K. government intended. But these decisions prevented other armed factions in Sierra Leone from entering the fray by demonstrating British resolve. The commitment of British forces in this manner eventually became the official UK policy.<sup>136</sup> The commitment of British forces in support of the legitimate government of Sierra Leone and the UN was critical to arresting the downward spiral, stabilizing the situation in the short term and ultimately allowed UN and government forces to defeat the RUF and bring them back to negotiations.

Initially, there was no campaign plan. Based upon the guidance that was given, the mission appeared clear-cut: evacuate designated personnel. This called for a tactical plan built around speed and mobility. This is what JRRF initially provided to the British Ambassador in Sierra Leone. By 7 May 2000, there were sufficient British forces to secure the Lungi International Airport, the Freetown Peninsula and the Ambassador's residence in preparation for evacuation operations. Once the initial conditions were established for successful evacuation operations, the British began to meet with leaders from the government and the UN in order to develop a better understanding of the situation. As the situation developed, Brigadier Richards developed subsequent military objectives and began to plan for future operations.

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<sup>136</sup> Griffin, *Joint Operations*, 208; Woods, *Military Intervention in Sierra Leone*, 63.

The initial campaign plan reinforced existing forces and secured key facilities in and around Freetown. During this phase, British liaisons embedded with UN and SLA units in order to provide advice and to assist in the planning of operations. Additionally, the evacuation of non-combatants occurred between 8 and 10 May. The next phase of the operation started with the arrival of 42 Commando, a battalion-sized force of 800 Royal Marines, and focused on the release of hostages and strengthening UNAMSIL and SLA forces. The final phase of Operation Palliser focused in training UNAMSIL and SLA soldiers in order to increase their capacity to combat RUF forces. Limited combat operations continued with UNAMSIL and SLA forces in conjunction with a Jordanian Special Forces battalion in order to restore confidence to the SLA. By the end of May RUF forces had been driven back and the tide was turned in favor of the UN and the government. Operation Palliser ended on 15 June with the departure of the bulk of British forces from Sierra Leone.<sup>137</sup>

Operation Palliser achieved not only its initial tactical objective but overall British strategic objectives as well. The initial military objectives provided the basis for subsequent planning because they identified the minimum criteria for success. Brigadier Richards could consider options for future operations once the conditions were set for the non-combatant evacuation. His understanding of the UK's strategic objectives allowed him to expand the role of his force in Sierra Leone. Brigadier Richards decisions were eventually adopted as the new British mandate because they were in line with overall British policy for the region.

## Conclusions

Brigadier Richards had this to say about Operation Palliser after it was over:

what transpired...was a fascinating example of modern day intervention operations in an uncertain environment. It started as a NEO but developed into something that had

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<sup>137</sup> Woods, *Military Intervention in Sierra Leone*, 64.

characteristics between counter-insurgency and small-scale war-fighting operations. I found myself directing a campaign at the operational level.<sup>138</sup>

Brigadier Richards recognized the uniqueness of the situation and the requirement to expand his mission beyond what he was initially charged to do – conduct NEO operations. Operating somewhere in between open hostilities and unstable peace, Brigadier Richards recognized the need to think operationally in order to ensure that his tactical actions achieved the British government's desired strategic objectives in the region.

In accordance with existing Army doctrine, Brigadier Richards was a tactical commander; however, his actions clearly displayed operational art. He developed a campaign plan that allowed his forces to achieve British strategic objectives for the region, namely, the end of the civil war in Sierra Leone. The initial British mission was limited to evacuating designated personnel, but Brigadier Richards saw an opportunity to effect changes that would 'prevent the UN from failing and to bolster the Sierra Leone government.'<sup>139</sup> His understanding of the tactical situation as well as Britain's strategic objectives in the region facilitated the generation of a campaign utilizing the limited assets available. The ability to recognize a unique opportunity and then utilize the available means to take advantage of it is a component of operational art.

## **CASE STUDY COMPARISON**

While Operation Desert Storm appears to confirm the utility of an operational level of war in accordance with doctrine, the next two cases do not. General Schwarzkopf and his headquarters functioned as the operational commander during Operation Desert Storm. He developed a campaign plan to coordinate forces across space and time in order to tie tactical actions to strategic objectives. General Schwarzkopf also served as a filter between political

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<sup>138</sup> Griffin, *Joint Operations*, 204.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 208.

decision-makers and his tactical commanders. Input from national leaders was limited to General Schwarzkopf, and he had the subsequent responsibility to translate this into operational guidance for his tactical commanders. In short, the operational level of war functioned in accordance with Army doctrine and within its intent to create a “politics free zone” at the tactical level.

The subsequent two cases are problematic for the doctrinal conception of a discrete operational level of war occupied by the corps formation. As operations progressed, Major General Nash and Brigadier Richards had to develop de facto campaign plans in order to achieve strategic objectives. Both commanders were talking directly with political leaders from their respective governments throughout the conduct of operations in order to synchronize tactical actions with strategic objectives. This indicates that they were operational commanders in spite of their echelon.

In the case of Bosnia, subordinate commanders had to create their own version of a campaign plan, which indicates the application of operational art at an echelon below the operational level of war. All of these commanders are considered tactical; therefore, by existing U.S. Army doctrine they should not have to apply operational art. In Operation Joint Endeavor, political influence on decision-making occurred down at the brigade level. This contradicts U.S. Army doctrine about the limitation of political interaction at the operational level of war.

From these three case studies two conclusions are drawn. First of all, war remains an inherently political process, and the introduction of an operational level does not change this. Using the operational level to create a politics free zone at the tactical level also fails because politics determine what is acceptable in war, and it is politicians who determine the aim and objectives.<sup>140</sup> This necessitates civilian involvement at whatever level affects their decision-making regardless of echelon, as was the case in Bosnia. Political decision makers influenced Major General Nash and his subordinate commanders during the conduct of operations. In the

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<sup>140</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, 607.

case of Operation Palliser, Brigadier Richards made inherently political decisions on the employment of British forces when he decided to take additional actions to end the civil war.

The second conclusion is that operational art is not constrained to the operational level of war. A commander uses operational art anytime he has to reconcile discrete tactical actions with ongoing strategic objectives. As demonstrated by the previous case studies, this is the case regardless of echelon. In Operation Joint Endeavor, Major General Nash had to develop a campaign plan to support both military and non-military operations in order to achieve evolving political objectives. In Operation Palliser, it was critical to Brigadier Richards' eventual success. This divorces the relevancy of operational art from that of the operational level of war because it displays operational art's importance at multiple echelons.

## CONCLUSIONS

U.S. post-conflict innovation was distinct from Soviet innovation. U.S. innovations sought to remove politics from the application of military means as a way of professionalizing the Army officer corps. The U.S. followed Huntington's approach to civil-military relations in a period of post-conflict innovation after Vietnam that resulted in the creation of the operational level of war. U.S. writers did this by borrowing Soviet concepts and then applying them out of context. Since its inception, the operational level of war has failed to perform its basic function to filter political interference at the tactical level. Consequently, it created an unreasonable expectation among Army officers that political leadership will refrain from injecting themselves into tactical actions. In Operation Palliser, the opposite occurred, and the tactical commander chose a course of action that had political import.<sup>141</sup> Therefore, the operational level of war is not only unhelpful but also irrelevant to the conduct of modern war. For this reason alone, the operational level of war should be removed from U.S. Army doctrine. Officers at all levels need

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<sup>141</sup> Griffin, *Joint Operations*, 208.



to recognize the inherently political nature of war and the operational level does not help with this understanding.

The authors of the 1986 edition viewed the operational level of war and operational art as interchangeable. This clouded the importance of operational art to the conduct of war because it was attached to a specific echelon. Operational art is practiced at any echelon whenever a commander has to tie discrete military action to strategic objectives. Therefore, it retains its relevancy with or without the operational level of war. By eliminating the operational level from doctrine, the importance of operational art can be reemphasized at every level.

This idea raises several important areas for additional study and research. The operational level of war and AirLand Battle doctrine are offensively focused for major combat operations. How this affected the training and readiness of individual units and the Army as a whole deserves additional attention and is beyond the scope of this monograph. As the organizing principle for the U.S. Army, the operational level has affected force generation. As the U.S. Army enters a period of fiscal constraint, it is important to understand the scope of those impacts. Finally, it is unclear how the reorganization of the Army professional military education system affected the preparation and performance of senior leaders in light of the recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Therefore, whether or not it served to increase the professionalization of the U.S. Army officer corps warrants additional investigation. Several recent writers have claimed that the senior Army leadership is not prepared to practice or develop strategy in light of their education, but it is unclear what impact the operational level of war construct has had on education and assignments.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> David Danikowski, *Practicing Strategic Leadership Without a License* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, School for Advanced Military Studies, 2010) 42; Hew Strachan, "Strategy or Alibi? Obama, McChrystal and the Operational Level of War," 180; James Pierce, "Is the Organizational Culture of the U.S. Army Congruent with the Professional Development of its Senior Level Officer Corps," *The Letort Papers* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2010), xiv.

U.S. Army doctrine writers have a unique opportunity to correct a mistake from twenty years ago as they rewrite *FM 3-0*, the Army's capstone document. The utility and relevance of the operational level to how the U.S. Army conducts war deserves serious consideration. It is this author's assertion that the operational level of war has hurt more than it has helped by attempting to make war something it is not. Removing the operational level from doctrine will help reestablish the link between tactics and strategy and generate increased understanding of the impact of tactics on strategy across the force.

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